



Connect-Bangladesh Newsletter



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The school year is now well underway, and we've started our largest collaborative project yet, involving sixteen schools in Bangladesh and the United States. In this project, students will examine their own communities and discuss them with partners around the world. Three Bangladeshi teachers from the Global Connections and Exchange Program are now in the United States as part of a teacher exchange, and we have just launched a second exchange program aimed at students. In this issue we'll also look at the most recently added ILC: the Badshah Faisal Islamic Institute in Jessore.



contents

Are you a student in Bangladesh or the United States? Are you thinking, "Hey, I could write a better article for newsletter than these guys?" Well, now is your chance. Send us something juicy and well written, and maybe we'll put it in the next issue. Send it to:

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GCEP Teachers Travel to USA

Page 2-3

The LINC Program

Page 4

Jessore Online

Page 5

My Community Lesson

Page 6

Connectivity Team Focus

Page 7

GCEP Teachers Travel to USA

The three Bangladeshi teachers selected to participate in a three week exchange visit to the United States departed today from Bangladesh. The exchange is part of the Global Connections and Exchange Program, a cultural and education program sponsored by the US Department of State.

The three teachers were selected from a large number of competitive applicants. The teachers, Sarker Wahida Jahan of Rani Bilashmoni Govt. Boys' High School in Gazipur, Shamima Akter of the Siraj Uddin Sarker Vidyaniketan in Gazipur, and Md. Abul Kashem of Shafiuddin Sarker Academy and College in Gazipur, were chosen on the basis of their active participation in GCEP internet learning centers, their computer and internet skills, and their English language abilities.

In the United States, these teachers will learn about the American education system, enhance their technology skills, and learn how to

integrate technology and project-based learning into the classroom environment. They will participate in workshops at the University of California at Los Angeles for two weeks where they will concentrate on information and communication technology and they will also spend one week with host teachers and the teachers' families around the country to experience American culture in a more personal setting.



Above: Exchange participants (L to R) Abul Kashem, Wahida Jahan and Shamima Akter and GCEP Exchange Coordinator Lela Lantz discuss travel plans during preorientation.

GCEP Overview

The Global Connections and Exchange for Bangladesh (GCEP) project has established a network of Internet Learning Centers (ILCs) in Bangladeshi secondary schools plus another nine satellite schools that share these facilities. The main goals of the program are to increase global dialogue and educational opportunities by installing modern computer equipment with Internet access in these schools, and to develop training and learning projects for teachers and students.

Global Connections and Exchange for Bangladesh activities include:

- ☐ Training educators to use computers and the Internet in classroom teaching;
- ☐ Partnering with US schools on student-centered civic education projects and teacher exchanges;
- ☐ Providing public access and programs for community members and disadvantaged groups;
- ☐ Developing sustainable practices for schools and communities.



During their stay, they will spend time in Washington D.C., the capital of the United States, where they will have a chance to experience and appreciate the history and culture of the United States. They will meet with representatives of the US State Department, the Ambassador of Bangladesh, and participate in an interview with Voice of America. Their relatives in Bangladesh will have a chance to hear the interview on the VOA's Bangla service.



Top: The three exchange participants cut the cake at the going away party.
Lower: Abul Kashem tries to pin the tail on the donkey. Fortunately for the donkey, someone eventually put the tail in its proper place.

At their pre-departure orientation in Bangladesh the teachers made computer slide show presentations about the history and culture of Bangladesh. During their visit to American classrooms, they will use these to deliver short lectures about their homeland. The slide shows cover topics like family life in Bangladesh, the structure and function of the government of Bangladesh, how the Bangladeshi education system works, and what kind of sports and leisure activities people enjoy in Bangladesh.

We would like to thank Peace Corps Volunteer Brian Jung for providing the teachers with an orientation to Los Angeles, where he lived for several years. He talked about what to expect in Los Angeles and provided some practical information about how to get around town.

The day before they left, the teachers and their families were invited to a going away party at the Relief International – Schools Online office in Dhaka, Bangladesh. They played some typical American party games like Musical Chairs and Pin the Tail on the Donkey. After a nice dinner and cake, the teachers headed to the airport and boarded the plane to America.

In the next newsletter, we will follow up with the teachers and see what they did in America and hear their thoughts on the experience.

Facts about Los Angeles: Most Americans call Los Angeles "LA". It is a large city in Southern California. LA is best known for its entertainment industry: movies and television. The population of Los Angeles County is nine million, the same as Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. LA is strongly influenced by Mexican culture, and many people who live in LA have relatives in Mexico.

A Glimpse of Things to Come: The LINC Exchange Program

We're excited to announce that we are now starting up another exchange program -- this one for students: the LINC program. Eight Bangladeshi students, ages 15 to 17, will travel to the US for a three week exchange, and eight US students will visit Bangladesh. The exchange will provide an opportunity for students to learn about each country's history and culture, and also study means of community-based conflict resolution. Recruitment for this program has just started in both the US and Bangladesh. Like the GCEP Project, LINC is funded by the US Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs.

Bangladeshi students interested in participating should email lela@ri.org.

Our 2005 GCEP Exchange Participants

Shamima Akter, a teacher with 7 years' experience, teaches class 6-9 mainly Math and General Science, but also Agriculture and Computer Studies. Ms. Akter finds the internet a useful tool for teaching different subjects practically and easily. She is able to find updated information as well as teaching methods, handouts, and many other helpful teaching tools quickly and easily. In the United States, Ms. Akter will become more familiar with the American system of education as well as how American students use computer skills for their educational purposes. She would also like to see how the culture of America plays a part in the computer education of the students. When Ms. Akter returns to her native country she will teach students to use the computer and internet. She will make projects with the students to put on the internet for the world to view. She will also encourage her community to become members of the internet learning center (ILC) by explaining to them how the computer and internet can assist them in their professions.

Abul Kashem, a teacher with 13 years' experience, teaches classes 5-10, mostly Computer Studies, but also Math and Chemistry. His additional activities include working with the debate team and cultural programs. Just like Ms. Akter, Mr. Kashem finds the internet a useful tool for teaching different subjects practically and easily. He has found pictures and teaching games from the internet to help develop his classroom activities. He finds students very eager to use the internet to help solve problems. When he goes to America he would like to see the American teaching method and the use of computer technology and internet in teaching. He would also like to see the relationship between the teachers and students. Upon return to his native country, Mr. Kashem will share his new knowledge with his colleagues, convey the new methods he has learned to his colleagues, create closer relationships with his students, and lastly encourage the community to use the ILC by inviting relatives of students to visit the ILC.

Sarker Wahida Jahan, a teacher with 5 years' experience, teaches mostly English, but also some Bangla and Religious Studies. Apart from teaching she is an active member of the school library committee. Ms. Jahan believes the internet is an effective learning tool because of its vast store of information. She also finds students very eager to use the ILC because they are able to learn by doing. They are not accustomed to applied learning, but this method has proven to be very effective and exciting for the students. In the United States, Ms. Jahan hopes to learn how to make teacher-students interaction more effective in the classroom and how the internet is best used for teaching. Upon return to Bangladesh she hopes to help computer users become more efficient with their time in the ILC, help teachers of other schools learn how they can use computers to teach their students, and encourage the community to become involved in the ILC.

Jessore Online . . . JOL?

The Badshah Faisal Islamic Institute (BFII) in Jessore is the most recent addition to the Global Connections and Exchange Program network in Bangladesh. Its internet learning center came fully online this summer, and the school has fully integrated computer learning into the curriculum. Each of the more than 900 high school students in the school, boys and girls, have regular classes in the ILC.

Whenever its own students are not using the ILC, the BFII has arranged for one of its four partner schools to use its facilities. The response from the partner schools has been staggering. Through clever transportation and scheduling arrangements in Jessore, students from schools located up to twenty kilometers away from BFII have been able to share the facility.



This latest center literally represents a new direction for the GCEP project in Bangladesh: south-west. BFII is the first ILC school in the Khulna division. The city of Khulna is another fifty kilometers to the south, with the Bay of Bengal lays even more distantly to the south. Bangladesh's western border with India is only about forty kilometers to the West, and Jessore is on the main route to Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) in India's West Bengal. Historically, Jessore was an agricultural center, as well as a trade center by virtue

of its position near crossroads.

Having ILCs in different corners of Bangladesh gives the GCEP project a chance to facilitate cultural exchanges within Bangladesh, in addition to its primary goal of establishing cross-cultural linkages between students of different countries. The cultural differences between cities are relatively large in Bangladesh, and there is plenty of room for discussion. This has been particularly evident for after school clubs which meet at the same time in different cities and sometimes chat via the internet.



Left: Students at the Badshah Faisal Islamic Institute work together on group assignments at their schools ILCs. Above: Parents of the students at the BFII were invited to the ILCs and given a tour of the facilities. In this photo, one of the students helps her dad navigate around

Over the last month, Relief International – Schools Online staff members have trained every teacher at the BFII and lead teachers from partner institutions — more than 60 teachers in all — in computer basics. The school will continue its education effort with weekly staff meetings in the ILC, where teachers will discuss their uses of the center, and exchange lesson plans, ideas, and technology hints.

My_Community

Earlier this month, the GCEP program began its most ambitious collaboration yet – a project engaging ten schools in Bangladesh and six in the United States. Students at each school will create web-based presentations to tell about their communities.

The lesson began in early September with discussions about what constitutes a community. Students spent a couple weeks figuring out what to show on their web pages – the people, places and institutions that define their communities and make them unique. They went “into the field” to photograph and interview teachers, shopkeepers, and other important members of the community. They learned the history of their towns and of local landmarks.

Students then went back to the classroom and learned to make web pages around this material. They had to consider which material to keep, and which to discard. In composing the web pages, they tried to think what material would be interesting to other students. With regard to overseas partners, they also had to keep in mind what pictures and stories would require a little more explanation to be understood by students from a different culture.

The product of these projects is a series of web pages which will be deposited on the www.connect-bangladesh.org website in the

last week of September. As the pages go up, students from each school will view the pages from all of the other schools. A series of international forum discussions will take place based on these projects, and will give students a chance to tell more about their community or ask questions raised by their partner schools’ web presentations.

Bangladesh Schools

Badshah Faisal Islamic Institute, Jessore
Bahadurpur High School, Jessore
Abdul Gafur Memorial School, Jessore
Sirajuddin Sarker Vidyaneketon, Tongi
Safiuddin Sarker Academy and College, Tongi
Rani Bilashmoni Government Boys
Highschool, Gazipur
Chowara Girls’ High School, Comilla
Chowara Islamia Senior Fazil Madrassa, Comilla
Yusup Multipurpose Technical
Highschool, Comilla
Shailarani Girls’ High School, Comilla

United States Schools

Plato Academy, Texas
Davis School for Independent Study, California
Melvindale High School, Michigan
High Tech High School, California
Delcastle Technical High School, Delaware
Camino Nuevo High School, California

My Community

PRESENTED BY .SHAILARANI DEVI GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL.COMILLA.

Meet Our Class

The name of our school is **SailaRani Devi Girls High School**. It is one of The oldest schools in Comilla district. Our schools stands on beautiful plot Of land. There are 30 rooms in our school. We are reading class eight



Connectivity Team Focus: Russell John, IT Officer

The Global Connections and Exchange Program wouldn't be very global if our computers didn't work. The program is based on the idea that students can get to know each other regardless of location through the techno-magic of the internet. Distances vanish when you can chat live anywhere in the world, view pictures from around the globe and work together with partners half a planet away. Someone has to make sure that all of the software, hardware and communications equipment work right, or the entire program would come to a jarring, whiplash-inducing halt. That someone is Russell John, the IT Officer in the Dhaka Office of Relief International – Schools Online.

Russell's desk is next to a rack of equipment with blinking lights and a bench piled high with computer innards. Cables snake back and forth between his desk, the rack and whatever he is building at the moment for our ILCs. His desk is covered in equipment brochures, manuals and computer code. Russell sits in this middle of this chaos, multitasking between phone calls, computer chats, and email, in an effort to keep everything running smoothly.



In addition to Russell, each ILC has an Onsite Monitor, a technician who keeps the center up and running, helps students and teachers use the machines, and makes sure that no viruses or other malicious software make their way to our computers.

In implementing the GCEP program in Bangladesh, we've run across technical problems that have required customized solutions, such as how to make everything run well using Bangla fonts. Russell has created online forms and databases for our entire operation, automating many of our routine tasks. From the perspective of our users, his latest accomplishments are upgrades to our website, such as the new photo gallery, seen at:

www.connect-bangladesh.org/gallery.

In addition to computers, Russell's other interests include stamp collecting and video production. He's a fan of Sidney Sheldon books, James Bond movies, and listens to a lot of trance music. If you want to trade stamps, or chat about double-oh-seven, you can drop Russell an email at: russell@ri.org.

And please, don't forget to visit our website:

<http://www.connect-bangladesh.org/>

If you'd like to receive copies of this newsletter each month, send a letter to nasir@schoolsonline.org and let him know.

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